

Montana Character Education Project Model



Participating Districts

Box Elder
Browning
Great Falls
Heart Butte
Helena/Wakina

Hays-Lodge Pole
Frazer
Poplar
Lame Deer
Hardin

Montana's Honor, Respect and Responsibility (HR2) Character Education Project Pillars

Our children cannot succeed as students, parents, professionals or community leaders until they first succeed as human beings. We stand dedicated to WHATEVER IT TAKES to create success.

The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI)'s **Honor, Respect and Responsibility (HR2)** Grant Project proposes to improve American Indian student academic achievement in Montana through the effective use of a character education school reform model developed by partner schools.



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MONTANA CHARACTER EDUCATION PROJECT

The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI)'s **Honor, Respect and Responsibility** (HR2) Grant Project proposes to improve American Indian student academic achievement in Montana through the effective use of a character education school reform model developed by partner schools.

The Montana HR2 project is unique in that it focuses on the cultural values and traditions of Montana tribes. The curriculum reflects this unique aspect and therefore promotes success through increasing a sense of belonging and purpose for students.

The Montana Character Education curriculum meets the requirements of MCA 20-1-501, the Indian Education for All law. The framework can be used by any school district, although it is particularly effective in schools with significant American Indian student populations and/or multi-cultural backgrounds.

The HR2 model encompasses the interdependency of the following:

School leadership

The school leadership directs and models the reform by promoting, reinforcing, and encouraging the incorporation of character education in all programs, discipline and activities through:


- Promotion of the Character Education (CE) mission and goals,
- Implementation of the program with assistance from a Local community council,
- Alignment of activities to educational research and the underlying principles of character education,
- Revision/modification of school policies to incorporate the character education program. For example, disciplinary referrals must reflect the virtue on which the student needs to work, or implementation of non-punitive/redirected behavioral strategies that promote positive student behavior,
- Commitment to the Student Bill of Rights, and
- Creation of a positive and inclusive school climate that promotes a sense of belonging for students.

Development of a sense of school and community belonging

Character Education is all about reinforcing the traditional values of the community served by the local school system to improve student success. Therefore, it is essential that each participating school builds community partnerships to achieve the goals of the HR2 grant. Creating a community of belonging is paramount to achieving success in our program. The activities also extend well beyond the school walls through various projects such as:

- Promotion of community/parental involvement
 - Welcoming parents and community members to the school
 - Establishment of a parent center and parent advocacy
 - Assessment of family needs/resources
 - Promotion of the active involvement of elders in the school through such programs as Grandparents in the Hall, Work to School, and/or cultural presentations with elders.
 - Inclusion of community programs in the school, such as:





Head Start

AWARE Program – Therapeutic assistance for entire family

HANDS Program – Day care before and after school

Boys and Girls Club – In-School Scouting

Family Resource Center/Advocacy

Parenting Programs – Healthy Mothers/Healthy Babies

Title VII (Indian Ed) – Resource Center/Advocacy

Bilingual programs

American Indian Culture Club

Vision Seekers – Mentoring for students of all ages

Optimists Club – Volunteers

Foster Grandparents – Classroom volunteers

Universities – AmeriCorps/Pre-service teachers

Church Groups – Clothing/ Shoes

Sam's Club – Eye exams and glasses

- Alignment of activities to educational research and the underlying principles of character education
 - Character education is the intentional, proactive effort by schools, districts, and states to instill in their students important core, ethical values that we all share such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others.
 - The 11 principles developed by the National Character Education Partnership (http://www.character.org/site/c.gwKUJhNYJrF/b.993263/k.72EC/The_Eleven_Principles.htm) serve as criteria that our sites can use to plan their character education effort.
 - “What Works” in Effective Character Education (CE) - Berkowitz & Bier (2004)

- **Curriculum and Related Activities**


The Character Education specific component of the curriculum evolves around select virtues. In general, one virtue per month is selected for study. Students explore that virtue using the format of **introduction, definition, examination, practice, recognition and reflection**. At the beginning of the year students create a "self learning symbol" (for example, a parfleash bag) and design it to reflect themselves and their unique heritage. During the study of each virtue, students create a token as a reminder of that virtue. When they master the virtue, the token is placed in their parfleash bag. At the end of the year, the student has created a unique bag filled with his/her mastered “virtues.”

This project is unique in that most CE programs teach the various virtues using a white, middle class, Anglo Saxon model. It is exactly for this reason that the researched national models were generally inappropriate for this project. The HR2 curriculum is steeped in diversity, but is specifically native in its design. For example, the parfleash bag is a traditional native “suitcase.” The student learns this fact about the Plains culture, but when crafting his own bag, may use traditional Norse or Celtic colors, symbols and design, for example, to reflect his own heritage.

The CE curriculum is visible throughout the school. Hallways display posters related to the virtue of the month and posters of the students' bill of rights and responsibilities.

- **Cultural Relevancy**

The Montana HR2 project is unique in that it focuses on the cultural values and traditions of Montana tribes. Most of our programs are in schools with high populations of American Indian students whose lives are closely connected with their tribal affiliation and "ways of



doing." Therefore the Character Education curriculum and methods are adapted to meet the needs of every school, community and family. This approach increases a sense of belonging for students, thereby promoting success. Research shows that having a sense of belonging helps improve academic achievement and reduces the incidence of anti-social behavior in the schools.

- The Circle of Courage

The philosophy of Dr. Martin Brokenleg as described in his book, *Reclaiming Youth at Risk*, is embraced by our Character Education Projects. We specifically employ the concepts outlined in his Circle of Courage (<http://www.reclaiming.com/>) approach and its emphasis on the importance of belonging.

- Character Education Room - Commitment to addressing the unique needs of each individual student

The Character Education (CE) room is staffed by a certified teacher who oversees the CE curriculum and provides teacher support and technical assistance. Students may self-select to spend time in the CE room, and students use this option for "time out" when their lives feel out of control and/or to obtain special one-on-one help with difficult concepts. New or transferring students are introduced to the CE room for orientation. They may spend several days there with the teacher. Students are tested for classroom placement, introduced to school expectations and routines, provided support to "catch up" with the work assignments in their new class and are provided with a peer mentor.

Parents are also participating in a welcoming orientation process. Under the direction of the CE room teacher, parents are introduced to the CE program, classroom curriculum, school policies and the parents' center.

Students referred for disciplinary reasons work with the CE teacher to review virtue expectations and/or reflect on student responsibilities under the Student Bill of Rights.

- Understanding Poverty

The Montana HR2 projects are in schools that serve a high number of American Indian children, many of whom are living in poverty. The educational ramifications of generational poverty are well documented. Middle-class teachers need to be aware of the obstacles, as well as the resilience factors, impoverished children bring to the learning environment. Strategies promoting resilience factors and addressing the obstacles need to be methodically implemented every day to help all students succeed.

The schools participating in the HR2 project have discovered that adapting their teaching strategies to address the needs of children living in poverty has been extremely effective. Although there are many programs focused on this goal, we have found Ruby Payne's training, "A Framework for Understanding Poverty" (<http://www.ahaprocess.com/>), and the accompanying support materials to be particularly valuable. The framework goes beyond a description of the unwritten rules of classism to outline effective strategies for teaching all children, including those coming from generational poverty. All sites are encouraged to include community agencies in the training as these agencies work with the families of the children served by the school system and therefore impact the conditions under which children are ultimately expected to learn.

- Focus on academic mastery



- The character education projects believe that mastery of reading is essential for academic success and focus on mastery of this priority in the early grades.
- The character education projects endorse the philosophy that our motto "Whatever it Takes" includes pro-active efforts to ensure academic success. Therefore, all students are carefully monitored for changes in academic learning that may signal stresses in their lives. Resource partners work closely with our schools to quickly solve issues that negatively influence each student's ability to succeed.
- Brain Research
The character education projects use current brain research on learning to develop strategies to assist in the learning process. Programs such as those proposed by the Quantum Learning Network in their *Quantum Learning for Teachers: Orchestrating Student Success*, have been very useful. www.QLN.com
- Montana Behavioral Initiative philosophy
If you expect it, teach it; if you teach it, practice it; when you master it, celebrate it!
- Indian Education for All goals
The Montana Character Education curriculum meets the requirements of MCA 20-1-501, the Indian Education for All (IEA) law. Indian Education for All provides the foundation for the curriculum and its goals are infused in every subject area, school-wide in the character education projects.
- Professional Development activities
HR2 focuses on sustained professional development activities and its incorporation into the entire school system. Professional development includes topics such as literacy training, Ruby Payne's Understanding Poverty training, Martin Brokenleg's Circle of Courage training, Character Education curriculum training and Montana Behavioral Initiative strategies.

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